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Lawyer refuse to give up hunt on Paisley case

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WASHINGTON — For lawyer Bernard Fensterwald — a veteran of the Kennedy assassination and Watergate investigations, and dozens of other controversies — nothing has been tougher than the search for answers in the case of missing CIA official John A. Paisley.

"This case will not go away," Bud Fensterwald said this week as he thumbed through the latest stack of documents the CIA reluctantly released to him in Fensterwald's battle to find out what happened to Paisley, a former neighbor.

Fensterwald was hired by Paisley's estranged wife Maryann to find out if her husband committed suicide, was murdered or was really dead. The mystery is "made up of tantalizing but seemingly unrelated parts that go nowhere," Fensterwald says.

The parts Fensterwald speaks of include:

- Evidence that Paisley operated undercover, even domestically, as far back as 1965, despite CIA denials that Paisley was ever in covert operations.

- A 1971 FBI memo showing that Paisley was under investigation for leaking secret SALT information.

- CIA logs showing that Paisley was involved in plugging White House leaks at a time he was supposed to be a CIA employee concerned with nuclear weapons.

So far Fensterwald's demands for documents under the Freedom of Information Act has yielded thousands of pages of internal memorandums, vouchers, personnel evaluations, letters, reports and even a picture postcard.

One of those those documents shows that Paisley's role was so secret that as far back as 1965 he was kept under a false identity even when briefing officials in the Johnson White House. The cover name Paisley used in those days was William Morell. CIA sources told the News Journal the name was borrowed from an intelligence operative.

CIA director Stansfield Turner publicly denied Paisley was ever in undercover work. The same files obtained by Fensterwald include official CIA statements criticizing stories in The News-Journal papers, the New York Times and elsewhere that said Paisley was a spy.

To make sense out of the scattered parts, Fensterwald is on the legal offensive. He filed a Freedom of Information lawsuit against the CIA to get access to information the spy agency says should be protected on grounds of national security. Fensterwald is also in U. S. District Court in Washington, suing Travelers Insurance Co. for its refusal to pay on a \$50,000 life insurance accidental death benefit.

Travelers will make no official comment on the case. Fensterwald and the insurance company lawyers agree that the policy was an accidental death policy Paisley acquired in 1977 in connection with his Exxon credit card.

Mrs. Paisley is suing Travelers for \$200,000 beyond the value of the policy for what Fensterwald calls "bad faith" on the part of the insurer. The insurance company has answered the suit, saying that there is no evidence the Paisley's death was accidental.

Fensterwald freely admits that both suits are designed "to ferret out information to get us a little closer to the truth in this case." Fensterwald just smiles when he is asked how a body discovered with two weight belts wrapped around

related to the strategic arms reduction (SALT) talks then going on. The FBI memo did not indicate to whom it was leaked.

Even more puzzling than the memo is are entries on the office logs of Edward W. Proctor, for whom he worked at the CIA and who was one of the agency's five top officials until 1977.

The logs show Paisley had frequent contact with the White House discussing how press leaks should be plugged. Those meetings continued well after Paisley was being investigated for allegedly being a leaker himself. Haig, contacted at United Technologies Corporation in Hartford, Connecticut, where he is chief executive, said through a spokesman he had no recollection of asking for an investigation into Paisley.

The logs reveal also that Paisley was involved in strategic weapons estimates, discussion SALT verification, spy satellites and demands of John Ehrlichman, then White House domestic affairs adviser. Numerous entries refer to the plumbers, the Nixon White House unit recruited from members of the CIA for domestic intelligence and other political shenanigans.

The Paisley case became one that has haunted the intelligence community on Sept. 24, 1978 when Paisley took off on his final sail in Chesapeake Bay.

The CIA first insisted that Paisley was a retired low-level official who knew no secrets.

The News-Journal papers quickly established, however, that Paisley had been the CIA's deputy director of strategic research, and that he continued to be actively involved in a variety of secret projects. The agency eventually confirmed that.

Paisley had also been involved in SALT negotiations, was an expert on spy satellite development and usage and apparently had a number of other secret assignments.

The official explanation of suicide, which the CIA tried to sell in briefings to the press, holds little water with Fensterwald or Mrs. Paisley. "They are hiding something else about John Paisley," Fensterwald says, "and we want to know what it is."